New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1951

Volume XII, Number 4 • Rachel W. Coffin, *Editor* • Week of February 12, 1951

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NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
NEW YORK POST HOME NEWS
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK MIRROR
NEW YORK WORLD TELEGRAM & THE SUN
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK TIMES

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"Ti-Coq"

The New York Times

February 10, 1951

AT THE THEATRE

By BROOKS ATKINSON

For some time word has been coming down from Canada about the volatile acting of Fridolin in his own drama entitled, "Ti-Coq." Both Fridolin and Ti-Coq stopped by at the Broadhurst last evening to visit a few New Yorkers and most of the Canadians in town. Fridolin, whose real name is Gratieu Gélinas, is an interesting, vigorous actor with a sharp and rather mannered style of playing. He has provided himself with a love drama that begins well but bogs down in some very maudlin playwrighting toward the end.

Since the first act is fresh, original and moving, it is a pity that Fridolin has not been able to finish his play on the same plane. It is the story of Ti-Coq (or Li'l Rooster), who is a French-Canadian soldier of illegitimate birth and is bitter about the legitimate part of the world. He falls rapturously in love with the sister of a buddy. The prospect of having her as a wife and also acquiring through her a whole family of relatives transforms Ti-Coq into an expansive and happy man.

* * *

Both in the writing and the acting, this shining process of turning a misanthrope into a full-fledged member of society is imaginative and affecting. For Ti-Coq is a man in love with simple things. He makes the simple things look rare and radiant, and he seems to bring new light into the whole world.

No doubt the writing and the playing are sentimental. But they both seem honest, and they are winning on that account. As an actor, Fridolin has some monotonous mannerisms, like throwing back his head and throwing out his left hand with a cutting gesture; and there is not much inflection in his voice. But he has a grim and terse sense of humor that is attractive. He is a cocky figure in his military togs, and he gets quickly to the point of a scene by attacking it belligerently. Ti-Coq is a clearly wrought and animating character.

He has brought along with him a group of amiable French-Canadians who play types with considerable spirit and color and whose hearts are big enough to include every one in the theatre. As "Ti-Coq's" buddy and prospective brother-in-law, Clement Latour gives a likable performance in familiar terms. As the father and mother, Fred Barry and Amanda Alarie are also ingratiating. As the girl "Ti-Coq" loves Huguette Oligny is an entrancing young lady with a notable gift for making something poignant out of the emotional scenes. Denise Pelletier, Juliette Beliveau and George Alexander help to give the play the illusion of intimate and deeply felt human life.

* * *

For the first half of the evening "Ti-Coq" seems like a disarmingly sincere portrait of a personable character and some fine people. But then Fridolin begins to shape the story to create scenes, and "Ti-Coq" becomes tricky and ingenuous. There are a number of actable situations in the last half of the evening, but it takes a lot of nimble talk to invent them. This theatregoer quickly lost faith in the integrity of the characters and the drama after the second act began. What was honestly sentimental in the first act looked increasingly mawkish and tawdry in the second. Too bad that so much understanding of people is wasted by the theatrical glibness of the last part of the evening. It destroys the enchantment of a beguiling idea.

"TI—COQ"

Play written and staged by Fridolin (Gratien Gelinas); settings and costumes by Jean Fournier de Belleval; presented by Fridolin Productions in association with Lee and J. J. Shubert at the Broadhurst Theatre, Feb. 9, 1951. The cast:

Commanding Officer..... George Alexander
Padre..... Jacques Auger
Jean-Paul..... Clement Latour
Ti-Coq..... Fridolin
Papa Desilets..... Fred Barry
Mama Desilets.. Amanda Alarie
Marie-Ange.... Huguette Oligny
Aunt Clara.... Juliette Beliveau
Germaine..... Denise Pelletier
Rosie..... Mary Barclay

Synopsis: Act I, Scene 1, Padre's office in a military camp near Montreal, December, 1942. Scene 2, Kitchen of the Desilets' home, in the village of St. Anicet, near Montreal. Two days later. Scene 3, Padre's office. Five days later. Scene 4, Entrance of the house where Marie-Ange and Germaine live in Montreal. The following week. Scene 5, Apartment of the two girls. Four months later. Scene 6, Aboard a troopship, June, 1943. Act II, Scene 1, Apartment of the two girls. November, 1943. Scene 2, A military hospital in England. The following month. Scene 3, Apartment of the two girls. A few weeks later. Scene 4, A tavern, near a repatriation camp in England. Six months later. Scene 5, At the door of Germaine's home. Sept., 1945. Scene 6, Germaine's apartment. The following evening.

New York Post
HOME NEWS

February 11, 1951

Melancholy Return of a Soldier

By Richard Watts Jr.

This has been a week in which the local drama critics have twice been forced to demonstrate what boorishly inhospitable fellows they are. First we were cold and scornful to a musical play known as "Jotham Valley," in which some hopeful visitors tried to tell us about the glories of good will in an embattled world. And now I have to be almost equally discourteous to a little French-Canadian work called "Ti-Coq," which a versatile man of the theater named Gratien Gelinas, who acts under the name of Fridolin, brought to the Broadhurst Friday night.

"Ti-Coq" which seems to have had considerable success in Montreal, was, I believe, originally written in French, but it is currently played in English of a sort, and, if you insist on knowing, its title means "Li'l Rooster." This is the knickname of its hero, a rather violent Canadian soldier, who seems to grovel in the fact that he is of illegitimate birth, and who falls in love with a quiet ingenue, just before he goes overseas. After he has been away a couple of years, she marries someone else, and it makes him pretty indignant.

Paradox

That is about all there is to the plot of the work, but it manages to involve something of a paradox in the course of its story-telling. The first of the two acts has a good deal of quiet charm in its modest fashion, and I found it pleasant and likeable enough to make me wish it were rather more of a play. Then, in the final act, it turns out to be drama of an almost tragic kind, with considerable violence to it, but, in the presence, it loses all of its charm and warmth and made me regret it ever tried to be a full-bodied play.

One chief trouble with it is that its hero, who seemed a touching and amiable fellow in the modest opening act, turns out to be one of the most unpleasant characters of the season, once the drama gets started. He is supposed to be unhappy about his illegitimacy, but if ever a man appeared to revel in the unfortunate matter of his birth and lean on it almost gloatingly, it is this Ti-Coq. Apparently the actor-author thinks he is a sympathetic figure throughout, but he behaves so annoyingly when he comes back from the war that he becomes a complete bore.

French-Canadian Family

The opening act, which is devoted chiefly to atmosphere and the characterization of a French-Canadian family, struck me as particularly refreshing because its people had a pleasant reality about them that was in delightful contrast to the slick superficiality that seems to me to mark another French-Canadian family in "The Happy Time." The warmth made me forget the monotonous and uneventful quality of the writing. But, once the heavy drama has begun and the hero is jilted, the inadequacies of the story-telling are only too apparent.

There are long periods of time when the play is virtually a monologue for Fridolin, and, although he is a pleasant and competent actor, I'm afraid he becomes tiresome before the evening has ended. I suspect he would be better in a play written by somebody else. There are good performances by Clement Latour as the girl's long-suffering brother, Jacques as a priest, and Denise Pelletier as the heroine's companion, and, indeed, all the players are engaging, but "Ti-Coq" can otherwise be greeted with little enthusiasm.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

February 10, 1951

= By HOWARD BARNES =

Poor L'il Rooster

"Ti-Coq," at the Broadhurst, brings the versatile French-Canadian showman known as Fridolin to town in a long drawn out contemplation of loneliness, romance and religion during the last war. He is a considerable showman, both in the writing and acting of a work which weaves uncertainly between high faith and passion. There are a few scenes in "L'il Rooster," as the title of the play would be translated literally, which have feeling and a genuine understanding of the vagaries of human experience. They are generally cancelled by inordinate over-acting and a series of sermons which keep bringing the action to a dead stop.

* * *

Fridolin, who is actually Gratien Gelinas, is better at performing and snatches of characterization than he is as a director. "Ti-Coq" is always just about to glow with meaning and dramatic power when it resorts to attitudinizing. The play, it may be remembered, ran for a long time in Montreal in French before it was translated into English. The translation is effective enough. The treatment of delicate subject matter against the lurid background of bastardy and battle is definitely wanting. Fridolin is obviously a knowing and ardent actor and a writer of sorts but he should have had someone else to control the contour of his drama.

* * *

The theme of this French-Canadian importation is simply that of a truculent youngster born out of wedlock who tries to nd a family by marrying the sister of a fellow in his outfit. His dual quest of love and a name is interrupted by hostilities and before he returns to Montreal, the lass has married another swain. In twelve adroitly designed scenes by Jean Fournier de Belleval, the work spins its somewhat mystical message, with a good padre standing by on every occasion that the small rooster finds a conflict between religion and the first good impulses of his life.

* * *

The mixture of melodrama, a rather tender love story and canons is a difficult one for clarity of expression. Fridolin is at his best in the bitterest portions of his piece. When his supporting players have a chance they help considerably in giving it depth and honor. Fred Barry is excellent as Papa Desilets and Denise Pelletier is effectoive as a distant cousin who helps to make a war-time romance crash. Jacques Auger does his best with the arduous assignment of the padre, who actually defines the dramatic structure of "Ti-Coq" and Clement Latour gives a sultry impersonation of the unhappy heroine's brother. As for Huguette Oligny, who dedicates herself to a waif and then deserts him, she is sometimes good and sometimes fair. She reflects the qualities of "Ti-Coq" almost perfectly.

Daily Mirror

February 10, 1951

'Ti-Coq' Likely to Appeal To a Special Audience

By ROBERT COLEMAN

For some years we've been hearing about a French-Canadian actor-author named Gratien Gelinas, known to his admirers as Fridolin. It seems that he produced a series of revues and then a comedy-drama called "Ti-Coq" in Montreal and other cities north of the border.

"Ti-Coq" is reported to have run for some 2,000 performances, in French and English manifestations. Finally Lee and J. J. Shubert persuaded Fridolin to bring the play to the U. S. After a Chicago engagement, it opened here last evening at the Broadhurst Theatre.

"Ti-Coq" has to do with a little bantam rooster of a man who goes around with a chip on his shoulder, looking for a fight. He feels the world is against him because of his illegitimate birth and subsequent years in an orphanage. Inducted into the Canadian Army during the last war, he has a scrap with a fellow soldier.

By way of making peace, the adversary invites Ti-Coq to spend the Christmas holidays at his home. He falls in love with his new-found buddy's sister, and looks forward to the end of the war when he can marry her. But just before his return from overseas, he learns she has been unhappily wed to another.

Back in Montreal, he persuades the faithless fiancee to run away with him, only to realize in the end that such a course is hopeless for both of them.

Gelinas has amazing vitality, and it sometimes leads him astray. In the title role, he starts at a tremendously dynamic pace, and manages to sustain it for two acts. He smokes several packages of cigarets, he is constantly banging his fists against some object. In fact, it is astonishing how they and assorted pieces of stage furniture manage to bear up under the pounding for a full evening.

Reminding you a little of Georges Carpentier—and Maurice Chevalier, about the chin—the versatile Gelinas is an interesting and ingratiating, though somewhat undisciplined, actor. We can only wish he had resisted the temptation to direct his own play.

Other likable and volatile people in the large cast are George Alexander, Jacques Auger, Clement Latour, Fred Barry, Amanda Alarie, Huguette Oligny, Juliette Beliveau, Denise Pelletier and Mary Barclay. Miss Oligny, Auger and Latour acted with commendable restraint.

"Ti-Coq," in translation seems to us a sometimes awkward and amateurish script. It has moments of hilarity and heartbreak, however. And it does offer a revealing picture of life in French Canada. We suspect it will appeal to a special audience.

DAILY NEWS

February 10, 1951

Fridolin, from Montreal, Invades This Friendly City With 'Ti-Coq'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Since "Ti-Coq" is not much of a play, the interest in last evening's premiere at the Broadhurst Theatre should be focused upon Fridolin, its author and chief player. Fridolin (full name, Gratien Gelinas) is reputed to be Canada's most beloved star, whether he does his stuff in French or in English, and he also is quite a character.

Fridolin, the actor, looks something like Stan Laurel when he isn't looking like Leo G. Carroll. In movement he uncannily resembles the early Katharine Hepburn ("Warrior's Husband," "The Lake") who tossed her head around so violently it all but spun away from her little neck. Fridolin is a really superb head-tosser. Also, as an actor, he is the most voracious cigaret-smoker since Maurice Chevalier was a boy, ranking with any Parisian hackie who ever drove a two-cylinder Renault to the second Battle of the Marne.

Fridolin, the playwright, is quite a bit like Anne Nichols, who wrote "Abie's Irish Rose," in his approach to domestic comedy scenes. He also reminds me somewhat of Channing Pollock, who wrote mildly philosophical little pieces. "Ti-Coq" is occasionally spicy, being highly flavored with gallic, but in the end he is quite decently opposed to sin.

He Craves Relatives.

In twelve scenes which are some times only distantly related, "Ti-Coq" tells of a Canadian soldier—part Bairnsfather's Bill and part Baker's Sad Sack—who is very sorry for himself because he is a bastard. Not just the kind one soldier might call another soldier, but a real bastard and an orphan besides. This b------ falls in love with a nice girl because she has such a big legitimate family. If he marries her he can have more sisters, cousins and aunts than Martyn Green. But before he can marry her he is called away to war and the girl, after waiting around the house for two years without ever being asked out to a dance, marries somebody else.

"Ti-Coq" began in Montreal as a play in French and for the New York invasion everybody switched over to English. Fridolin is genuinely bilingual and Huguette Oligny, as the girl, is pretty good at our queer tongue. But some of the other members of the company had one hell of a time of it last evening, and so, frankly, did I. They reminded me of Donald Ogden Stewart's little girl Mildred, in "Mr. and Mrs. Halibut Abroad," dutifully reciting "Ou est l'encre et ou est la plume de ma tante" in her horrid reverse-English.

Journal American

February 10, 1951

The Cast Is Bright and Able And the Play Has Its Moments

By JOHN McCLAIN

An utterly charming group of French Canadians bowed into the Broadhurst Theatre last night in a play named "Ti-Coq," produced, written and almost entirely acted by Gratien Gelinas, who because of great popularity on the radio is known familiarly North of the border as Fridolin, the character he created for the air.

There isn't a bad performance in the lot, with the possible exception of Fridolin's, and I say that about him with full knowledge that he has tremendous strength and sense of comedy, but I don't think he wrote the drama best suited to his own talents.

He is a semaphore actor. He seems unable to deliver a line without waving his arms about wildly, lighting cigarets and flicking ashes here and there, giving the general impression that he is trying desperately by signals to tell somebody that his rudder is disabled and he needs to be taken in tow.

• • •

Over-Acting

This might be highly effective in a musical, which I understand he occasionally produces, or farce, but in this effort, which has its serious moments, it must be regarded as almost ludicrous over-acting.

For instance, I would have been delighted with his drunken scene in the English tavern last night if it had been played strictly for comedy and not as the key to the tragedy that had recently befallen him.

On the other hand there are moments of wonderful fun in the show. There is a brilliantly-written interlude between Fridolin and Clement Latour, who plays his possible brother-in-law, in a British military hospital. And there is a monologue by Juliette Beliveau, delivered from a rocking chair, and a really solid performance by Denise Pelletier all across the boards.

The plot of "Ti-Coq" centers around Fridolin, somebody's illegitimate offspring who finds himself in the Canadian Army in 1942. He is taken home for Christmas by a friend (Latour) and falls in love with the friend's sister (Huguette Oligny).

Before being shipped overseas he gets her promise that she will wait for him until he gets back from the war, but after fighting it out for 18 months she finally succumbs to an urge to go out dancing and the next thing you know poor Fridolin gets the "Dear John" letter.

• • •

Loss of Faith

She has married the young and eligible 4-F. When he returns and confronts her she admits she really loves him still but in a over-long scene in the last act it develops that the whole thing wouldn't work anyway because of his loss of faith in her.

A padre (Jacques Auger) has a lot to do with all this and, as mentioned before, the supporting parts of Mom, Pop, Aunt and cousin are uniformly excellent.

Fridolin is certainly a most positive personality with many gifts. I can understand why this show was a big success in Canada, where it was played both in French and English, and where local nuances and highly demonstrative acting were perhaps better understood.

I don't think it will be a hit here, but I should welcome seeing the entire company return in a vehicle that will provide more adequate scope for their light and bright abilities.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

February 10, 1951

'Ti-Coq' Bows With Nifty Cast

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

Type—Tragi-comedy
Topic—Love
Cast—Exceptional
Course—Downhill
I find.—Many virtues

The French Canadian importation, "Ti-Coq," or "Little Rooster," which opened at the Broadhurst last night, is several years old. It has been played in French and English, around Canada and at previous stops in this country, with great success.

The play has so much in its favor, that its faults are doubly irritating. It has great humanity, glowing warmth, and a tough, sharp way of making its points and building its characters.

Guttersnipe Story.

In brief it is the story of a tough little guttersnipe, born illegitimate, who finds his first family ties through a friend in the Army. Suddenly his cocky independence melts. He falls in love with a whole family, and particularly with a lovely girl to whom he becomes engaged.

It is wartime, and inevitably he is separated from the new friends. The girl is faithful as long as she can manage. Then her family forces her to go out, and in time she marries another man.

They are all good Catholics, and when Ti-Coq returns he must face the permanent loss of the girl. For a flash, when he finds she still loves him, he forgets his bitterness, and urges her to run away with him anyway. Clearly, though, their union can bring none of the things he now regards most highly in life, and they must make their decision unemotionally.

Charming First Half.

Through the first half of this, "Ti-Coq" is as charming as a play can be. It is sprightly, sharp, funny and gently intimate. The various members of the family are simply introduced and humorously developed. All this is played with deep honesty, and it is extremely well directed by the author-star.

When the play turns toward tragedy, it begins to slow down. There is a rare piece of writing and playing in the scene when a maiden aunt warns the girls of a lonely future. But when the rest of the family begin to urge her to gaiety, the story is just routine and tedious.

Gratien Gelinas, or Fridolin, as he is better known in Canada, has produced, written, directed and starred in the play. It would be hard to improve on his work except for some of the playwriting.

Fridolin rises with authority to his most demanding scenes. His mannerisms are likely to irritate people unfamiliar with his background. He punctuates every statement by hitting something, violently dashing ashes off a cigarette, or cracking his arms in the spastic lateral gestures of a drum major. Constant repetition makes this movement dominate the thought of his lines.

Huguette Oligny is quite remarkable as the girl he loves. The role demands great youth and simplicity, and she conveys, as well, an honest insecurity without getting sorry for herself.

As her room mate, Denise Pelletier is responsible for some of the play's brightest moments, and Juliette Beliveau is grand as the old maid aunt.

Clement Latour gets wry humor from the brother's lines, and Fred Barry and Amanda Alarie seem authentic and colorful as the girl's parents.

"Trial by Jury" & "H.M.S. Pinafore"

New York Post
HOME NEWS
February 6, 1951

Another Pleasant Savoy Evening
By Richard Watts Jr.

The world is still looking bright and contented in the vicinity of the St. James Theatre, where the strolling players of the D'Oyly Carte Company last night got around to their production of "H.M.S. Pinafore," with the brief "Trial by Jury" thrown in as a curtain-raiser for good measure.

Once more the eminent Savoyards are in characteristic form, with their distinguished veterans, Martyn Green and Darrell Fancourt, again triumphing in two of their famous roles, and that should be enough to satisfy anybody.

In one way, the always-welcome visitors are functioning even better than they did in "The Mikado." Last week, as wonderful as they were, a few of the players tended to be inaudible at times, making it a little difficult to understand all of the incomparable lyrics. Now, in both "Pinafore" and "Trial By Jury," they make every word properly audible, and that makes them not terribly far from perfect. I kept wishing they were doing "The Pirates of Penzance," but this was probably just to maintain my status as a critic.

Martyn Green

At this point in my life and yours, I'm afraid there isn't much new light I can throw on the glories of the good ship Pinafore, and I suppose I might as well go right on to the matter of the performances. Again Mr. Green demonstrates that he is not only superbly equipped for Gilbertian roles but is one of the truly great clowns of his time. The Right Honorable Sir Joseph Porter, the First Lord of the Admiralty, doesn't give him as many chances as the immortal Ko-Ko offers, but he is a delight just the same.

Mr. Fancourt, who specializes in the fearsome roles, is, of course, once more the sinister Dick Deadeye, who gets so much satisfaction out of being outrageous. Where he thundered ferociously as the Emperor of Japan, he cringes balefully as the able seaman, but in both cases he is a model of humorous wickedness. If the current D'Oyly Carte Company had only Mr. Fancourt and Martyn Green to offer us, there would be sufficient reason to be grateful to it. But, as you know, there are other causes for gratitude.

Two Naval Men

Style is almost everything in the playing of the Gilbert and Sullivan masterpieces, and the Savoyards have it in abundance. Two of the newcomers to the company have proper opportunities in "Pinafore," Neville Griffiths as Ralph Rackstraw and Eric Thornton as Captain Corcoran, and they have the style of the veterans. In particular, Mr. Griffiths, who was the wandering minstrel in "The Mikado," reveals a voice of exceptional quality, and is of immense help to the evening. The sense of audience well-being is everywhere in evidence.

The one-act "Trial By Jury" is unquestionably a minor Gilbert and Sullivan item, but there is still a lot of fun in it. Richard Watson, the illustrious Pooh-Bah of "The Mikado," has the role of the dubious judge, and, although he approaches the task in somewhat different fashion from the great Bobby Clark's playing of licentious jurists, he again shows what a fine comedian he is. I think I can safely say that a good time was had by all last night. And just remember that next week the visitors will do "The Gondoliers" and "Iolanthe."

"TRIAL BY JURY" and "H. M. S. PINAFORE"

Revival of the operettas written by W. S. Gilbert; composed by Arthur Sullivan; staged by Eleanor Evans; settings by Joseph and Phil Harker; presented by the D'Oyly Carte Opera Company at the St. James Theatre, February 5, 1951. The cast:

"Trial by Jury"

The Learned Judge.....Richard Watson
Counsel for the Plaintiff...Alan Styler
Defendant.....Leonard Osborn
Foreman of the Jury.....Donald Harris
Usher.....Radley Flynn
Associate.....Ivor Emmanuel
The Plaintiff.....Enid Walsh
1st Bridesmaid...Joyce Wright

"H. M. S. Pinafore"

The Rt. Hon. Sir Joseph Porter...Martyn Green
Capt. Corcoran...Eric Thornton
Ralph Rackstraw.....Neville Griffiths
Dick Deadeye...Darrell Fancourt
Bill Bobstay.....Donald Harris
Bob Beckett.....Radley Flynn
Josephine.....Muriel Harding
Hebe.....Joan Gillingham
Little Buttercup...Ella Halman

The New York Times
February 6, 1951

'Pinafore' and 'Trial by Jury' Sung by the D'Oyly Carte Troupe From Britain

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Even for the D'Oyly Carte Company, the performances this week are exceptionally brilliant. Our British cousins, to say nothing of our sisters and our aunts, are singing the twin bill of "Trial by Jury" and "H. M. S. Pinafore," at the St. James, where they opened for business last evening. If New York is normally alert, the business ought to be panicky. For the orchestra is more sparkling than it was last week, when it was plenty good enough; and the singers and chorus are in the best of voice and spirits.

No doubt about it, "Trial by Jury" is a priceless trifle. Since it came early in the Gilbert and Sullivan collaboration, it has a sophomoric exuberance that is heartier than the humor of some of its betters. The performance this week is both droll and crackling, if such things can be. Richard Watson's supercilious judge, preening and driveling grandly from the bench; Radley Flynn's officious usher; Leonard Osborn's foppish defendant and Enid Walsh's coy, bridling plaintiff are extremely well sung and acted.

* * *

If "Pinafore" has ever been as well done in this town, your correspondent must have happened to be absent. Muriel Harding has a lovely soprano voice and she plays Josephine with demure and mincing comedy. As Ralph Rackstraw, the love-sick seaman, Neville Griffiths sings with the sort of mocking passion that Gilbert would have doted on. Ella Halman's Little Buttercup, that plump and pleasing person in the bum-boat trade, is thoroughly enjoyable; and Darrell Fancourt makes something soundly fantastic out of Dick Deadeye's ugly misanthropy. Although Eric Thornton's Captain Corcoran is rather stiffly acted, it is pleasantly sung.

We have all come to expect something extraordinarily good whenever Martyn Green appears on the stage, for he is the King of Savoyards. But his impeccable, dry-mannered Rt. Hon. Sir Joseph Porter, K. C. B., is unusually good even by Mr. Green's own standards. Poised and precise, it radiates polished satire. It is light and graceful; it is trim and imposing and shining with good humor.

* * *

If you want to be petulant about it, the chorus could make the words a lot more intelligible. But it sings with a beautiful voice and plays buoyantly. Something should be said also in praise of George Sherringham's enchanting costumes for the ladies, and in honor of the scenery designed by Joseph and Phil Harker. This is the most pleasing production in the repertory so far.

Although "Pinafore" is, of course, perfect, it is less perfect than "Iolanthe" and "The Pirates of Penzance," which have lovelier music and come later in the repertory. For, mind you, there are subtle gradations of perfection in Gilbert and Sullivan. But this reflection on the quality of "Pinafore" may be a conditioned reflex. Years ago everyone who was fortunate to have two sisters had to listen pretty constantly to a score for four hands drummed out on the upright piano. After four or five years of this form of family entertainment one became relatively familiar with the score and lyrics and could understand why Gilbert later referred to this work as "that infernal opera, 'Pinafore.'"

* * *

Moreover, "Pinafore" has been played by every Tom, Dick and Carrie. Veteran theatregoers can probably recall a monumental performance at the original Century Theatre that had a stage large enough to float the entire British Navy. There was a brass band, if memory serves. The setting represented one of the most stalwart vessels ever put together. The male chorus was forever springing into the rigging, scrambling up the rat-lines and singing from the yards.

From the point of view of muscle-tone and diaphragm-exercise, this was one of the healthiest "Pinafores" in history. When the New York engagement closed, it sailed down the Hudson River and put out to sea, the chorus men working the sails and cheerily singing—

We sail the ocean blue
And our saucy ship's a beauty.
We're sober men and true
And attentive to our duty.

Well, that is neither here nor there. All that matters is that this week's performance by the D'Oyly Carte Company is a masterpiece.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

February 6, 1951

= By HOWARD BARNES =

Still Deserves 4 Cheers

THE D'Oyly Opera Company of London is continuing its captivating repertory at the St. James Theater with scintillating revivals of "H. M. S. Pineafore" and "Trial by Jury." The necessity of a curtain-raiser has sometimes been suspect, but the two Gilbert and Sullivan operettas complement each other brilliantly. At the hands of an able company under excellent direction, the celebrated twin bill stands up superbly. Even a new-comer to Savoy operas can derive tremendous satisfaction from two delectable musical satires which have weathered three-quarters of a century graciously.

* * *

"H. M. S. Pinafore" is, of course, the piece de resistance of the current week's jubilant offering at the St. James. It has two of the great performers of the D'Oyly Carte company, Martyn Green and Darrell Fancourt, in leading roles. They are in fine fettle, both vocally and as the sly interpreters of one of Gilbert's most sardonic contemplations of the Victorian world he lived in. Moreover, Neville Griffiths is on hand with his fine tenor voice and attractive personality to make able seaman Ralph Rackstraw quite proper and eloquent in his wooing of the captain's daughter. Ella Halman will be remembered by veteran Savoyards as a bumptious Little Buttercup, and Eric Thornton is fine as the captain of the Pinafore.

* * *

To those who have not been accustomed to the delights which a company dedicated to G. & S. for many years can afford, it must suffice to say that it plays with verve, variety, good tonal quality and a gaiety which is always pervasive. Green has been doing the roles of the repertory until he is able to characterize the Rt. Hon. Sir Joseph Porter (First Lord of the Admiralty), with exactly the right touch of sarcasm. Fancourt is never far behind him in keeping a lampoon on England's Navee extraordinarily buoyant and newcomers to the great aggregation are never at a loss to intertwine words and music excitingly.

* * *

"Trial By Jury" is somewhat trifling in its consideration of a breach of promise suit, but it is given elegant definition in the current production. Richard Watson is very good as the learned judge and Alan Styler and Leonard Osborn match styles of acting and good voices as the defendant and counsel for the plaintiff. The visiting company from England has given us another treat for which we can be grateful.

Journal American

February 6, 1951

D'Oyly Carte Scores With Double Bill

By JOHN McCLAIN

The D'Oyly Carte Opera Company last night presented at the St. James Theatre the second of their series of Gilbert and Sullivan Operas.

This time it was a sort of double feature—"Trial by Jury," a one-act travesty on the British judicial system, and "H.M.S. Pinafore," by all odds one of the most engaging works of the great team.

Here again, as in the case of "The Mikado," their first presentation, one is assured an entirely delightful evening listening to reminiscent tunes rendered by true professionals, laughing at the completely corny antics of Martyn Green and pleasantly digesting the simple story line which holds music and lyrics together.

One is therefore provoked to wonder why, in the last 60-odd years, nobody has arisen to challenge the eminence of Gilbert and Sullivan.

We Accept Less

One argument, of course, is that we have all been brought up in the tradition to the extent that we mechanically accept something less than first class. On the other hand I am told that youngsters, seeing it for the first time, are entranced—even as you and I.

In my own behalf I submit that there is a preponderance of classy talent involved, and that nobody since has been as successful in fashioning a sprightly story structure to music and verse, at the same time delivering melodies as indestructible as "Tit Willow" and "Poor Little Buttercup," to name only two.

I seriously doubt that 40 years hence anybody could make money with even the most brilliant company touring the sticks with a repertory of George Gershwin musicals—if that's comparable.

Be that as it may, the festivities last night were enhanced by Neville Griffiths, the new tenor in the role of the sailor in "Pinafore," and of course Martyn Green in his familiar part as First Lord of the Admiralty.

* * *

Incredible Ability

Mr. Green has the incredible ability, through a series of tried and tested routines, to keep any given song going as long as he wishes. He came back for six encores last night, and the only reason the audience didn't demand 60 was that he finally got bored, or ran out of business.

"Trial by Jury" is actually merely a mild warm-up for the main event, an almost entirely musical exposition of what happens in a British court when a young man is brought to trial for failing to proceed with the wedding plans.

If you don't know the story of "H.M.S. Pinafore" at this late date you should be ashamed of yourself. In fact the best thing you can do is go to the St. James Theatre and make amends.

Daily Mirror

February 6, 1951

D'Oyly Carte Players Give Savoyards Bargain Bill

By ROBERT COLEMAN

The D'Oyly Carte Opera Company offered a bargain bill at the St. James Theatre last evening, presenting two works for the price of one. Among the many good things about "H.M.S. Pinafore" is that you also get "Trial by Jury" for free, as a curtain-raiser.

As we have previously reported, the visitors from London are in top form this season. They are singing and acting with an exuberance and precision that is admirable indeed. We have never heard them to better advantage during the past several years. Since their last visit, new and welcome additions have been made to the company.

"Trial by Jury," the lusty jibe at justice that provoked Queen Victoria, had a rollicking performance last night. Richard Watson, as the judge, and Radley Flynn, as a rowdy court usher, won appreciative applause with their high-spirited horseplay. Enid Walsh, as the plaintiff, and Leonard Osborn, as the defendant, were excellent. And the chorus of bridesmaids was quite a sight for the eyes.

"Pinafore," which takes a satiric poke at British Naval brass-hats, also piqued good Queen Victoria, and she took her dislike out on librettist W. S. Gilbert by denying him a coveted knighthood. It remained for Edward VII to rectify the error. Victoria, of course, had made Sullivan, Sir Arthur, because he merely wrote the music.

Today, we suspect, dignified British judges and austere admirals laugh as uproariously at "Trial by Jury" and "Pinafore" as do dyed-in-the-wool Savoyards. We have learned to unbend and enjoy clever sallies at the expense of red tape and stuffiness in high places.

Martyn Green delighted the first-nighters at the St. James with his Sir Joseph Porter, who became First Lord of the Admiralty because of his penmanship and proper respect for his betters in the right quarters. In this role, Green is suavely amusing, forsaking the broad strokes he uses so expertly in "The Mikado."

Neville Griffiths, new to American audiences, won enthusiastic and well deserved palm pats for his beautifully sung Ralph Rackstraw. Others meriting salutes were Darrell Fancourt, Eric Thornton, Ella Halman, Muriel Harding and Joan Gillingham.

The settings and costumes are fresh and attractive, far superior to what we usually get from the average Gilbert and Sullivan company. It is a genuine pleasure to share the joys of the G. & S. gems with such gifted and happy interpreters. And no review of the D'Oyly Cartes would be complete without a bow to musical director Isidore Godfrey.

It is interesting to watch the audiences at the St. James. Savoyards are in a class by themselves. So conscientious are many of them that they come to the theatre equipped with liberettos and even definitive tomes on Gilbert and Sullivan and their masterpieces. They spend their money to revel in the inimitable classics, and they get their money's worth.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

February 6, 1951

Savoyards Treated to Twin Bill

By ROBERT BAGAR.

A Gilbert and Sullivan double bill is as welcome to the devotees of this type of music as "Pagliacci" and "Cavalleria Rusticana" are to the Metropolites. All of which serves to introduce the fact that at the St. James Theater last evening the D'Oyly Carte Opera Co. of London offered "Trial by Jury" and "H.M.S. Pinafore," a fine bracketing from any standpoint.

This reporter's admiration for the works of the inimitable pair dates back to childhood days. And it is always a particular pleasure for him to hear their operettas so beautifully done by the D'Oyly Carte troupe.

Musically, both works were a rare treat last evening, a matter which attests nobly to painstaking rehearsal and all-round intelligence. The man mainly responsible for that, of course, is the conductor, Isidore Godfrey, a gifted veteran G&S performer.

The precision singing and playing that is done by the company (which for this engagement includes local instrumentalists) was, in some ways, superior to any other en masse production I have recently noted, not excluding grand opera. Everyone in the cast is part of a flawless musical machine that does honor to both the Gilbert and Sullivan D'Oyly Carte traditions.

There were especially good voices, too, particularly those of tenor Neville Griffiths, the Ralph Rackstraw, and Muriel Harding, the Josephine, in "Pinafore" and Leonard Osborn in "Trial by Jury." The stage action, the business, that is, never fails to come across the footlights, thanks to the remarkable co-ordination of all elements in the presentation.

And Martyn Green, one of the subtlest comic performers I have ever observed, was a show in himself as Sir Joseph Porter, K.C.B., in "Pinafore."

Pretty girls and handsome young men abound in the productions. And the fetching costumes and sets were not less important in the total scheme than any other aspects.

DAILY NEWS

February 6, 1951

D'Oyly Cartes In Double Bill

Some of the most happily excited people in town are those who are going these nights to the St. James Theatre. They are smiling and laughing as they go in just before curtain time, whereas other playhouses are lucky if their customers are smiling and laughing as they go out. The reason that the D'Oyly Carte Company is playing the St. James.

Last evening the company offered "Trial by Jury" and "H. M. S. Pinafore." With Richard Watson as the Judge and Martyn Green as the First Lord of the Admiralty, the Savoyards were, as usual, in excellent form. And the set for "Pinafore" is a really handsome layout.

The double bill continues the rest of this week. Next week will be split between "The Gondoliers" and "Iolanthe."

—John Chapman

"The Rose Tattoo"

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

February 5, 1951

By OTIS L. GUERNSEY JR.

Williams Tops the Season

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS'S visits to Italy have borne rich fruit in "The Rose Tattoo," an excellently written and brilliantly acted comedy-drama of Sicilian-Americans at the Martin Beck. With Maureen Stapleton as a fiery widow and Eli Wallach as her clownish lover, the new work shuttles between passion and humor as it studies a set of characters living under tin roofs on the Gulf Coast. Is is not as vaporous as previous Williams scripts; there is substance in these people and their emotions, as though the dreamer has been subjected to a maturing agent. There are erratic moments and weaknesses in construction, but these do not matter much in what is certainly the finest new American play of the season.

* * *

"The Rose Tattoo" is curiously disconnected, almost as if the playwright had changed his mind in medias res. There is a promise of blood, black widowhood and vendetta in the opening scenes as Serafina, the adoring wife, suffers the loss of her handsome rascal of a husband, sets up his ashes beside the statue of the Virgin and then learns that her beloved had played her false. Just as her rage reaches the pitch of mania, the mood changes with the entrance of a sorry wight named Mangiacavallo, a truck driver who resembles her husband from the neck down and whose fumbling way of living woos the sympathy of Serafina. From this point forward the play takes on the color of the rose which is its repeated symbol as Mangiacavallo overrules the neat little melodrama plan with his apologetic personality. The necessity for resolving Act I complications messes up Act III in a bald use of the telephone device; but in the courtship of Serafina and Mangiacavallo—in Sicilian origin the wife of a "baron" and the grandson of a village idiot—it is a subtle and beautiful piece of theater.

Miss Stapleton's Serafina is an acting gem, a full-dimensioned woman living at full tilt on a middle ground between the old world and the new. Her speech is a mixture of Italian and accented English; she is caught between peasant superstition and religious devotion, and she gives her daughter a wrist watch, a symbol of the machine age, for graduation but cannot resign herself to such loose American social customs as a high school dance. In nothing else, however, is she half-hearted: in love, hate and even worship she is hot-blooded and defiant. Miss Stapleton's performance rises to crescendos of hysteria, but it is equally well modulated during her reluctant affair with the truck driver. Her vivid acting is a superb illumination of a vivid part.

Eli Wallach, too, must be given a large share of the interpretive honors. As the fellow whose name means "Eat a horse" in Italian, he makes a nice adjustment between nobility and buffoonery. His Mangiacavallo attracts great sympathy as well as loud laughter as he voices his despair at his own shortcomings and yet fills the stage with an irrestible humanity. Daniel Mann's direction, though

"THE ROSE TATTOO"

Play by Tennessee Williams; staged by Daniel Mann; settings by Boris Aronson; costumes by Rose Bogdanoff; presented by Cheryl Crawford at the Martin Beck Theatre, February 3, 1951. The cast:

Salvatore.....Salvatore Mineo
Vivi.....Judy Ratner
Bruno.....Salvatore Taormina
Assunta.....Ludmilla Toretzka
Rosa Delle Rose...Phyllis Love
Serafina Delle Rose.....Maureen Stapleton
Estelle Hohengarten.....Sonia Sorel
The Strega.....Daisy Belmore
Giuseppina..Rossana San Marco
Pepina.....Augusta Merighi
Violetta.....Vivian Nathan
Mariella.....Penny Santon
Teresa.....Nancy Franklin
Father De Leo..Robert Carricart
Doctor.....Andrew Duggan
Miss Yorke.....Dorrit Kelton
Flora.....Jane Hoffman
Bessie.....Florence Sundstrom
Jack Hunter.....Don Murray
Salesman.....Eddie Hyans
Alvarro Mangiacavallo.....Eli Wallach
Man.....David Stewart
Man.....Martin Balsam

Synopsis: Locale—A village populated mostly by Sicilians somewhere along the Gulf Coast between New Orleans and Mobile. Time: Today. The play is in three acts, during all of which the curtain is dropped a number of times to denote the passage of time, usually a few minutes or hours. Between the third and fourth scenes of the first act, however, there is a three-year lapse.

at times nervous or forgetful, is adept at bringing the oddly matched pair closer and closer together on an island in the midst of a strident neighborhood. With Wallach and Miss Stapleton in top form, "The Rose Tattoo" has embedded a genuinely moving love story among the petals of a colorful but difficult existence.

As a supplement to the main theme, there is Phyllis Love as Serafina's daughter, admirably reflecting the thin, bright flame of adolescent passion for a sailor, portrayed as a conventional callow American youth by Don Murray. Ludmilla Toretzka leads an Italian chorus of broad, garrulous and gossipy women neighbors, and Robert Carricart is a priest who cannot cope with the unpredictable Serafina. The playwright has further peopled the stage with children, a witch, a salesman, street walkers and even a goat in an atmosphere so clearly established that it compensates for several small salients of bad dialogue that certainly should have been cut. The Boris Aronson set of a house in the tall grass near a Gulf Coast highway is ideal for the purpose of this Cheryl Crawford production. Not everything in "The Rose Tattoo" is exactly right, but its flaws are petty compared to its virtues. It throws more than mere credit on Williams, Miss Stapleton, Wallach and the other collaborators; it is a rare and warm experience, distinguished in form and striking in effect.

Daily Mirror

February 5, 1951

'Rose Tattoo' Is Thorny, Much Too Earthy

By ROBERT COLEMAN

We know of no modern playwright who can create moods like Tennessee Williams. But, unfortunately, Williams is prone to create his moods on a level of frustration and neuroticism. Even when he tries to be affirmative, he is usually negative. And we believe that the world today needs moral affirmation and not negation.

This is apropos of Williams' latest play, "The Rose Tattoo," which Cheryl Crawford brought to the Martin Beck Theatre last evening. The new arrival is a study of sex-mad Sicilians living along the Gulf Coast between New Orleans and Mobile. It is particularly concerned with Serafina Delle Rose, whose husband has been destroyed by the authorities while transporting dope concealed beneath loads of bananas on his mighty ten-ton truck.

Serafina remembers her husband as a descendant of Sicilian nobility and the acme of everything that a volatile woman should crave in a man. After his tragic death, she places his ashes in an urn beside a statue of the Virgin. Later, she is terribly disillusioned to discover that her paragon-husband had feet of clay.

So, in a Williams mood of distraction, she gives herself to an itinerant truck-driver, who has the body of her deceased husband and the head of a clown. Shocked by her mother's faithlessness, Serafina's 15-year-old daughter, who had been graduated from high school that day, rushes off to emulate the affair with an unwilling and protesting young sailor.

"The Rose Tattoo" takes its title from the fact that Serafina's husband, rival and shiftless suitor all have roses tattooed on their chests. And the springboard for the tragedy is: "...the streams are in their beds like the cries of women and this world has more beauty than a ram's skin painted red," from T. S. Eliot's translation of "Anabasis."

William Rose Benet, in his "The Reader's Encyclopedia," says: "Anabasis means a journey upward." We can only say that Williams, in paraphrasing Eliot and Xenophon, has taken a journey downward to the very depths of human degradation. He has penned a play that has moments of compassion, beauty and sheer nastiness.

In the last act of "The Rose Tattoo," for instance, a lecher drops an unmentionable article on the stage. And there are episodes that can be construed as sacrilegious. Personally, we were revolted. We do not think these dubious elements add anything to a confused play. Rather, we believe they are going to antagonize decent playgoers.

Maureen Stapleton gives a dynamic performance as Serafina. Phyllis Love, Eli Wallach and Don Murray are outstanding in other roles. Only lack of space prevents our paying tribute to at least a dozen other excellent contributions.

Daniel Mann, an up and coming young director, has done an exceptional job with a difficult script. And Boris Aronson has designed a superlative setting.

"The Rose Tattoo" is a provocative play. You will either like it or dislike it immensely. Count us among the dissenters.

Journal American

February 5, 1951

Play Isn't Worthy Of the Fine Acting

By JOHN McCLAIN

The chief operatives in "The Rose Tattoo"—Maureen Stapleton, Phyllis Love, Eli Wallach and Don Murray—deserve a better fate than that which befell them Saturday night in the new Tennessee Williams play which opened at the Martin Beck Theatre.

Miss Stapleton, in particular, delivered one of the most arduous and exacting performances of the year but regrettably the theme is thin, frequently offensive and never sufficiently provocative.

Many persons, among them Mr. Shakespeare, have devised a drama around the single idea of a seduction but the more successful have done it with greater taste and ingenuity. Never before, to my knowledge, has a rather simple biological situation involved so many extraneous characters and so many words—or been so pretentiously elevated.

The story Mr. Williams tells is that of a Sicilian immigrant's young widow, living with her teen age daughter in a small house and worshipping at the shrine of her departed husband's ashes, prominently displayed on the parlor table.

* * *

Had Rose Tattoo

The deceased had a rose tattoo emblazoned on his chest and it seems that following conception this same insignia would appear on his wife's breast.

Along comes Eli Wallach, a truck driver, and the rest of the action involves his ultimately successful effort to recreate this strange phenomenon.

To achieve this he produces a similar rose tattoo on his own chest and convinces the widow, among other things, that her late lamented had been guilty of considerable extra-marital activity beyond her ken.

The result is that she shatters the vase containing her husband's ashes and repairs to the boudoir with Mr. Wallach.

There are thousands of neighbors and children, lending movement and atmosphere to the proceedings, and there is a subordinate love story involving her daughter, played by Phyllis Love, and a sailor, Don Murray. There is even a goat which is chased across the stage at intervals, but none of these alter or enhance the simple basic problem.

I thought there were two compelling scenes: (1) where Miss Stapleton first meets Mr. Wallach and, (2) where Don Murray tears himself away from Miss Love in the last act.

* * *

Fine Acting

I publicly promised that I would not use the expression "tour de force" in describing the performance of Miss Stapleton, so I can only say that it was magnificent throughout and worthy of more notable material. Mr. Wallach, last seen in a minor role in "Mr. Roberts", gave great credibility and humor to his difficult part.

The direction by Daniel Mann impressed me as being somewhat cluttered at times, although that may have been the fault of all the people who were required to appear and disappear frequently and for no good reason.

I do not happen to know what a house in a "village populated mostly by Sicilians somewhere between New Orleans and Mobile" would look like, but Mr. Boris Aronson's single set seemed suitable.

I don't think "Rose Tattoo" is a good show, but I'm looking forward to seeing these new players back on the boards in something more worthy of their abilities.

The New York Times

February 5, 1951

AT THE THEATRE

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Tennessee Williams is in a good mood in "The Rose Tattoo," which opened at the Martin Beck on Saturday evening. And there is no reason now why audiences should not be in a happy mood for the rest of the season. You may grumble a little about the unevenness of the story, for not everything Mr. Williams has to say is pertinent or dramatic.

But his folk comedy about a Sicilian family living on the Gulf Coast is original, imaginative and tender. It is the loveliest idyll written for the stage in some time. For the past six years Mr. Williams has been feeling fairly hopeless about human beings, and his wretched characters have been writhing in pain.

Now he is writing about a simple-minded Sicilian woman who has known the glory of love. Although her husband, a truck-driver, is killed in a motor accident, her memory of love still sets her apart from the unloved and from the cheaters. She dedicates herself to the ideal of a great love that has enriched her life.

* * *

Unfortunately for the ideal, her husband did not love her alone. Gossip about his infidelity walls her around with a murmur of ridicule and malice. It torments the widow's spirit and turns her against the world. But another truck-driver appears off the road when she is lowest in her mind and restores her to her normal health. He is not the man her husband was, but he returns her to the warmth and comfort of human society.

As a play, "The Rose Tattoo" lacks the intensity of "The Glass Menagerie," "A Streetcar Named Desire" and "Summer and Smoke." It moves along loosely and loquaciously. But to those of us who were afraid that Mr. Williams had been imprisoned within a formula it is especially gratifying. For this is a comic play that is also compassionate and appreciative. Some of it is hilarious; those gusty and volatile Sicilians blow hot and cold at bewildering speed.

But Mr. Williams does not condescend to them. "The Rose Tattoo" is not written from the outside. Mr. Williams admires their vitality and their native understanding, and delights in their wholesomeness. The love affair between the widow and the truck driver is not far from low comedy. But there is a love affair between the widow's daughter and a sailor that has all the lyric rapture and sincerity of young poetry. As sheer writing it is one of the finest things Mr. Williams has done. Forget the sprawling workmanship of the play as a whole. The respect for character and the quality of the writing are Mr. Williams at the top of his form.

Fortunately, the performance and the production are superb. Boris Aronson has set the play inside a livable cottage which, in turn, lies inside a warm, lazy environment. And Daniel Mann has directed a tempestuous performance that alternates between moods of anguish and excitement and also explodes now and then with comedy.

The cast includes a number of shrewish women, jeering children and local characters; and these parts are well cast and played. The chief characters are admirably acted by players who have caught the sunny freshness of the theme.

* * *

As the widow's young and eager daughter Phyllis Love gives a tremulous, darting performance that is likely to break your heart if you do not brace yourself, for she is an idealization of the kind of unspoiled love Mr. Williams is writing about. As the sailor, Don Murray plays opposite her with youth, honesty and principle that compose the perfect counterpart. Robert Carricart acts a local priest with simplicity that is wholly winning.

In the part of the truck-driver, Eli Wallach gives a humorous, naïve, frustrated performance in a light, buoyant style. But "The Rose Tattoo" is a play about the widow who is always on stage and who, in the course of the evening, pretty thoroughly speaks the autobiography of her soul. It is a long, exhausting part in a tone of continuous excitement. Maureen Stapleton's performance is triumphant. The widow is unlearned and superstitious and becomes something of a harridan after her husband dies. Miss Stapleton does not evade the coarseness of the part. But neither does she miss its exaltation. For Mr. Williams has sprinkled a little stardust over the widow's shoulders and Miss Stapleton has kept the part sparkling through all the fury and tumult of the emotion.

Everybody deserves a little pat of appreciation—Rose Bogdanoff for the perceptive costumes, Charles Elson for the eloquent lighting and David Diamond for the evocative background music. For this is a happy occasion in the theatre. Mr. Williams can compose in the halcyon style as well as the somber one. Now we can be sure that he is a permanent source of enjoyment in the theatre

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DAILY NEWS

February 5, 1951

'The Rose Tattoo' Affectionately Written and Admirably Staged

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Tennessee Williams has fairly out-Saroyaned the amiable Armenian named William in his newest play, "The Rose Tattoo," which Cheryl Crawford gave a splendid production Saturday evening at the Martin Beck Theatre. There also is more than a touch of Steinbeck in this affectionate chronicle of the sexual urge in a Sicilian-American colony somewhere along the Gulf Coast between New Orleans and Mobile.

But the play is no imitation; it is all Tennessee Williams, and it reveals again his preoccupation with baffled and love-hungry people. Its mood is comic, not tragic, and its humor is first-rate. And, once again, the author has been blessed with some remarkably persuasive players and a sympathetic director. With the evocation of director Daniel Mann, Maureen Stapleton, Eli Wallach, and Phyllis Love and Don Murray are giving fine performances.

Miss Stapleton, whose Broadway career has included only so-so parts, emerges as an actress of a high order in the physically and emotionally taxing role of the fiercely religious and fiercely loving widow of the driver of a banana truck who has been shot over some involvement concerning a consignment of dope concealed beneath his bananas. To the widow, Serafina, this husband, whose name was Delle Rose, was a man among men. He had a rose tattooed on his chest, and he was a great lover.

Memory Defiled.

Serafina disregarded the advice of her priest, had her husband cremated, placed the ashes beside a statue of the Virgin in her parlor and would have been reasonably happy in her mourning had not an awful doubt struck her. Had her husband been faithful, as she still is faithful? In three years of widowhood this doubt has so eaten at Serafina that she has become the neighborhood character. Her dressmaking business has gone to pot, she goes about unkempt, wearing only a slip and no shoes, and she quarrels loudly with her friends.

She is well on the way to becoming a lunatic and would become one, too, when she finally learns that her husband really was unfaithful, if it weren't for another banana truck driver who comes into her life. He is a brash, amiable fellow who is looking for a widow of property and in his swift and zealous pursuit he even has a rose tattooed on his chest to remind her of her dead spouse. He is at hand when Serafina learns that her revered Delle Rose had betrayed her and she has a wild assignation with him. Mr. Wallach plays the lover most engagingly.

A Noble Sailor.

Wild, too, is her 15-year-old daughter, Rose, who rebels at her mother's keeping her away from men. The girl flings herself at a sailor, and Mr. Williams has the humorous pleasure of causing a member of the U.S. Fleet to resist the torrid importunities of a virgin with all the strength of Galahad himself. And here are two more good pieces of acting by Miss Love and Don Murray.

Mr. Williams' human insight is unimpaired and his ability to write vivid scenes is, as always, exceptional. But his notion of play construction is still his own and "The Rose Tattoo" does not go in any one direction very long at a time. He must know better than I do why Serafina, once so strict, at last urges her child to go and sleep with the sailor—or why this should be a satisfying resolution of the play. There also is too much meaningless business involving a neighborhood witch and the pursuit of a goat.

Boris Aronson has made another of his finely imaginative settings and it will be even more effective when the light cues get straightened out. Saturday night the lighting was erratic and confusing.